

IMPACT

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HEALTHY FOOD, HEALTHY LIFE

We are what we eat and drink

BETTER GET USED TO DRINKING TEA WITHOUT ADDING SUGAR. THEN ONLY YOU CAN ENJOY THE REAL TASTE OF IT. ONCE THE SUGAR IS ADDED YOU WILL ONLY FEEL ITS SWEET TASTE AND WILL MISS THE REAL TASTE OF BLACK TEA

BY SAMANGIE WETTIMUNY

Yes, of course! The belly rules the mind!

That is exactly why we have to be extremely careful of what we eat and drink. Consuming a nutritious diet throughout the life course is essential to lead a long, healthy, and happy life without falling prey to diseases constantly. Non-Communicable Diseases and other negative health conditions being on the rise more than ever before, it is absolutely necessary to pay close attention to various food types people consume and methods of preparation.

According to World Health Organization, people are now consuming more foods high in energy, fats, free sugars, and salt/sodium, and many do not eat enough fruits, vegetables, and other dietary fibre such as whole grains.

Head, Department of Nutrition, Medical Research Institute, Ministry of Health, and well-known nutritionist Dr. Renuka Jayatissa said that adults, just as their children, should develop healthy eating habits because nutrition is integrally linked to good living, good health, and wellbeing.

As Dr. Jayatissa highlighted in her earlier interview with *Sunday Observer Spectrum*, even though 85 percent of schoolchildren are consuming home-cooked food, still many of our children suffer from nutritional related issues

She reiterated that the current food preparation practice needs to undergo change.

"Our cooking practices have to change. We can very well prepare a healthy meal with available ingredients, but we have to be more careful. You need not fry food unnecessarily. We can make less fatty, but tasty food. Better not overcook vegetables until their natural colour vanishes. And avoid adding too many spices," she said.

The maximum amount of sugar requirement for adults is 6 teaspoons per day, for children it is 3 teaspoons. The salt requirement for adults is one teaspoon per day, Dr. Jayatissa added.

Benefits of drinking tea

Just as the saying goes sometimes all you need is a good cup of tea! Dr. Jayatissa said that drinking plain tea without sugar offers many health benefits.

"Sri Lanka's black tea contains a considerable amount of polyphenols. Many research studies have shown its capability to prevent cancer, strokes, and dementia."

Green tea will help prevent the abdominal fat layer since it contains a lot of caffeine. "But the advantage of Sri Lankan Black tea is that it contains almost the same amount of caffeine as Green tea. Hence we get the same advantage by even drinking black tea."

"Better get used to drinking tea without adding sugar. Then only you can enjoy the real taste of it. Once

the sugar is added you will only feel its sweet taste and will miss the real taste of black tea," she said.

Fruit juices

Are fresh juice drinks as healthy as they seem? the *Sunday Observer* asked the renowned nutritionist.

There is increasing evidence that over consuming fruit juices will increase the risk of cancer. Citing international research Dr. Jayatissa said that fructose content is quite high in fruit juices. Any fruit or fruit juices contain a 'naturally occurring sugar' called fructose. It has been found that fructose from whole fruit doesn't add to our intake of free (or added) sugar, but it is the other way round when consuming fruit juice or smoothies.

"When it comes to fruit drinks, people tend to drink/take a lot without paying much attention to its quantity unlike when you are eating the whole fruit. We tend to exercise more self-control over what we eat than what we drink. It is not at all healthy to over-consume fruit drinks," she emphasized.

Sweeteners

Artificial sweeteners are definitely worse than sugar, Dr. Jayatissa said. Artificial sweeteners can turn healthy bacteria in the gut microbiome into harmful microbes/pathogens. In short, sweeteners will kill good bacteria.

"Human gut contains good bacteria as well as bad ones. As per re-



Dr. Renuka Jayatissa

search, these good bacteria really help control all the diseases. If one's gut contains good bacteria, he/she can remain healthy most of the time. It is very important to have more good bacteria in the gut. But sweeteners will kill our good bacteria."

Prebiotics promote the growth of beneficial bacteria in the gut. She mentioned that fermented foods are rich in beneficial probiotics and have been associated with multiple health benefits. Fermenting foods is an ancient food preservation method.

"Hoppers, our main fermented food is usually made from fermented rice flour and coconut milk. But now these fermented foods are being prepared using instant food preparation methods. Even food types such as 'diya bath' or 'achcharu' are prepared

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instantly. Proper fermentation methods are hardly practised now. Another best source of prebiotics is good curd. Good curd improves prebiotic bacterias," she said.

Diet plans

Following diet plans for weight reduction without proper guidance is as dangerous as overeating itself. There are thousands of so-called fast diet plans on the web which promise you a slim figure in no time and many people try to put them into practice in a haphazard manner.

Citing the latest research, Dr. Jayatissa said even though diet plans would help one reduce weight immediately, after a while he/she would gain more weight than what they lost initially.

"Sometimes you can even get heart diseases as a result of careless diet plans. When you deviate from a proper healthy diet, many drastic internal changes such as blood sugar levels dropping too

low may occur."

What Dr. Jayatissa highlighted was as one starts a weight-loss plan, the water content of the body will go down and the body weight will drop accordingly. "It will make you very happy when you lose 2 kilos or so within the very first month. But the truth is that weight loss is not due to fat burning. After a while, you develop a stronger craving for foods and your body will get used to that increased amount of food which will eventually make you more obese than earlier."

She emphasized that just as one gained weight in a systematic manner, losing weight too should follow the same systematic way.

"If you are overweight, losing 10 percent of your body weight immediately is clinically significant. This is crucial to prevent the risk of getting diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, and heart diseases. Once that crucial 10 percent of weight is reduced, you are out of danger. Next, you should follow a slow process to lose weight over the years until you come back to normal."

Should we be skipping dinner to lose weight? The *Sunday Observer* asked,

"I think we have to take all three meals. No need to skip any meal," Dr. Jayatissa said. "People should not starve. Food is there to enjoy. But it is important to avoid unhealthy eating habits - too sweet, too oily snacks in particular."

She said we have to make a conscious effort to replace unhealthy snacks with healthy alternatives - plain tea and/or a slice of fruit (one banana a day, etc/ peanuts, or sesame balls in between meals.

How much should we eat?

A balanced main meal - with rice (one-quarter of your plate,) protein-rich food such as meat, fish, dhal, cowpea, green gram eggs, milk, yogurt, and curd (the other quarter), and the remaining half is for vegetables, green leaves, and fruits-is important for your health.

"When eating milk rice make sure that you don't overeat. One big slice would do because the calorie content is high in milk rice. If string hoppers are large in size, stick to five and not more. If you practise this food intake pattern for a while the stomach gets used to that quantity and not more. It is absolutely fine to take rice for all three meals.

But the quantity again is vital. One cup of rice per meal is enough."

Regular exercise is a must

"If you are keen to reduce weight you have to walk above 10000 steps a day. But for a person who already maintains a healthy weight, 6500 steps a day is fine. Even if you are walking inside the house, you have to walk at least 10,000 steps a day. Being seated in one place for longer hours will slow down your metabolism," she added.

She emphasized the importance of keeping human muscles healthy and strong.

"Back then, our older generation used to engage in a lot of physical activities that would automatically keep their muscles healthy. They used to drag water from the well, fetch water, etc. We lack such physical exercise now. Hence adequate caring for muscles is a must."

When asked how often should we weigh ourselves, Dr. Jayatissa said it is better to do so at least once a year.

"Ideally, we should weigh ourselves once a month. Then it is easy to maintain a healthy body. You cannot gain more than five kilos a month. So make it a habit to weigh yourself at regular intervals," she said.

Being a vegetarian

"In Sri Lanka vegetarians do not have that many food options. However, they can take grains such as cowpea, and chickpea on a regular basis. Constant intake of milk and dairy products such as curd and yogurt too is fine," she said.

Vegetarians should make sure that they maintain their protein level by consuming protein-rich food. Dr. Jayatissa added that consuming dhal curry for one main meal of the day will fulfill the protein requirement of the body to some extent.

"Moringa (drumsticks) leaves contain amino acids. Consuming one tablespoon of moringa powder a day is highly recommended," she said.

Omega 3

The fat composition of our diet is highly imbalanced. In our country, people consume double the required amount of saturated fat. But we eat only 1/3 rd of the required amount of unsaturated fat.

Unsaturated fats can be further subdivided into mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acids. Omega 3 contains mono unsaturated fats.

Omega 3 is really essential for our body. Since Omega 3 fatty acids are a type of fat the body cannot make on its own, if our usual diet does not provide it adequately Omega 3 supplements (1000mg) are usually recommended. The content of this type of fats is high in small fish such as Borllo and kumalawa, she added.

Dr. Jayatissa added that it is vital not to deviate from traditional food and culinary habits to maintain a healthy body and mind.

